

Using Storybooks as a Character Education Tools

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the views and implementations of preschool teachers in “giving character education through picture storybooks”. Descriptive review method was used in the research and supported with focus group interviews. For this reason data were took from two study groups (for the descriptive study group n=245, for the focus group n=24 teachers). Study results show that character education is the important for the teachers, teachers use picture storybooks that support character education, however they find themselves partly competent in giving character education with picture storybooks, and think story books useful and effective in terms of character education, believe that teachers should be a role model in character education, and methods like drama, play, question-answer, and brainstorming are much preferred for an effective character education. Upon these results, enhancement of books that support character education in children’s literature and courses aimed at character education in preschool teaching departments can be suggested.

Keywords: Picture storybooks, values, character education, preschool education.

1. Introduction

Character education is a process of transferring and acquiring values to children (Ulusoy and Dilmaç, 2012). It includes many aspects of teaching and learning for personal development such as reasoning, social and emotional learning, moral education, life skills training, community service, health education, prevention of violence, peer mediation and ethics (Demirel, 2009; Durmuş, 2010). The purpose of character education is raising children as insightful, caring, high-minded, righteous people and individuals who use their best capacity to do their best, and who understand the purpose of life (Acat and Aslan, 2011; Lake, 2011). It also helps children to get to know and desire for the good and engaged in good actions eventually (Karatay, 2011).

However, transferring of values to children and putting into practice in their lives is not as easy as it is expected (Beil, 2003), the use of various methods and media is necessary. One of them to facilitate character education is children's books. In particular, picture storybooks are indispensable guides that transport children to the real world by passing him from the mazes of an imaginary world. Using these books is extremely efficient and helpful in the transfer of core values such as tolerance, sharing, helping to children (Parker & Ackerman, 2007; Edgington, 2002). In this regard, storybooks that are intended for children as an educational tool should also be capable of supporting their social and emotional development in addition to being informative and entertaining (İşitan, 2005; Karatay, 2011; Akyol, 2012).

Children get to know the worlds of different characters through stories and being inspired from these, they can create their own emotions and thoughts without hesitation (Zeigler, 1992). Discussion of these stories in a follow-up activity enables students to gain knowledge and experience of these positive social attitudes and behaviors such as sharing, collaboration and helping (Uzmen, 2001). Story is an important tool in the socializing of the child and the transfer of the traditions to future generations along with the role it plays in the preservation and expansion of existing values (Court & Rosenthal, 2007). Because children enjoy when the parents and teachers read them and they become aware of cultural beliefs and values through implicit messages. Also, stories introduce the world of words to the children, provide a feeling of general satisfaction and makes life fun and entertaining (Choudhuri, 2005). Therefore, picture storybooks are one of the most valuable tools to benefit from by the teachers for the acquisition of values that form the content of character education.

No matter what the objectives of the education or the content and the tools to be used are, the architects of nurture are teachers (Senemoğlu, 1998). Education system owes its success dramatically to the quality of the teacher. When character education is in question, which aims a direct impact on the emotion, attitude and behavior of the child, teacher's role becomes even more important. Therefore, it is important and essential to obtain knowledge about and examine the views and implementations of teachers in the acquisition of character education through picture storybooks.

This study aims to investigate teachers' views and implementations about the acquisition of character education through picture storybooks within the framework. It is expected that the study will be a guide to the research intended for placing more character education books in preschool children's literature in Turkey; and will be a beneficial resource for the experts, authors, illustrators and publishers working in the field of preschool children's literature and character education.

2.Method

2.1. Research Model

Descriptive review method was used in the research in terms of the aim and the data used. Review methods are review arrangements carried out on either a part of a group, example or sample of a population or whole population (Karasar, 2012). The research is supported with a qualitative study which is carried out with the method of "focus group interview" conducted with three separate groups of teachers.

2.2. Study Group

Two study group was created for this research. All of the participants were preschool teachers serving in official independent kindergartens affiliated with Ministry of Education in Ankara (Turkey). The first study group was occurred 245 teachers. 99.6% of the teachers were female, 92.2% work as the permanent staff, 75.1% had a degree of preschool education, 13.5% had a degree in child development. 24 teachers who were volunteer to participated second study chosen sample a total of participated in the study on a voluntary basis.

2.3. Instruments

"Identification Form for the Teachers' Views and Implementations Relating to Character Education" and "Focus Group Interview Practice Guidelines" were used as a research tool. Expert review strategy was adopted for the preparation of "Identification Form for Teachers' Views and Implementations Relating to Character Education". Experts were chosen from three different faculty members of department of preschool education.

They examined and rated the items from 1 (slightly)-3 (mighty) with regard to content, understandability and appropriateness for the research. All of the expert reported that the items in the initial instrument were appropriate for the research ($M=3.0$). Prior to administrating the instrument required changes (e.g. wording) were done based on the experts' comments.

2.4. Data Analysis

The approach of content analysis, which is used in qualitative research methods, was benefited for the analysis of data obtained from the study. The aim in content analysis is accessing to the concepts and relationships that can explain the data (Creswell, 2013; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Interrelated data is primarily grouped under codes and themes in content analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011; Patton, 1990). For this purpose, views and implementations of the teachers was grouped and explained with frequency and percentage values. Voice records of the focus group were turned into text. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011) state that the digitization of data obtained from the documents can be a preference of the researcher. In this research, the analyses of data obtained from the focus group interviews were grouped as well, and interpreted with the all data received from "Identification Form for the Teachers' Views and Implementations Relating to Character Education".

3. Findings

Findings from first study group were shown in the tables and second group (focus group) results were identified below the table to clarify and compare the teacher's views. At the beginning teachers were asked whether they were accept the impact of character education. 93.9% of the teachers agreed that character education should be supported in early childhood. Also 87.8% of the teachers agreed that character education can be provided through picture storybooks.

The views and implementations of preschool teachers on character education through picture storybooks are grouped and given in 10 Tables.

In Table 1, 69.4% of the teacher state that they have story books that supports character education. 94,1% of them agree that storybooks support character education of children, 39,8% think that they help values to survive and be transferred to the future generations, 28,1 % state characters in the story are role models for the children, 14% state pictures in the storybooks facilitate learning and stories embody abstract concepts in character education.

72,2% of the teachers find themselves partially competent and In focus group interviews, teachers stated impact of character education with picture storybooks, however, they experience problems in providing and think that these books should be enriched in quality and increased in number. Also all of them expressed that they attached importance to character education, preschool education should completely focus on character development and acquisition and character education will flourish in cooperation with the family.

Table 1. The views of preschool teachers on character education through picture storybooks

Teacher views about character education with picture books	f	%
In my class, there are picture storybooks that support character education.	170	69,4
I have problem in providing picture storybooks with character education feature.	91	37,1
Existing picture storybooks with character education feature are quantitatively sufficient.	80	32,7
Existing picture storybooks with character education feature are sufficient qualitatively.	98	40,0
Reasons for choosing picture storybooks	f	%
The characters in the story are role models for children	62	28,1
The pictures in the storybooks create awareness and facilitate learning	31	14,0
Stories embody abstract concepts related to character education	31	14,0
Storybooks support character development of the child	208	94,1
Content and the characters of the story help learning become permanent.	11	5,0
Stories enable values to be experienced and transferred to future generations.	88	39,8
The competence of teacher in providing character education	f	%
I'm very competent	62	25,3
I am partially competent	177	72,2
I am not competent at all	6	2,4

Table 2. Proffered character traits that were developed by the teachers on providing character education through picture storybooks (n = 245)

Character traits	f	%	Character traits	f	%
Responsibility	197	80,4	Patience	98	40,0
Love	173	70,6	Peace	89	36,3
Honesty-Integrity	171	69,8	Courage	79	32,2
Respect	168	68,6	Modesty	75	30,6
Friendship	158	64,5	Freedom	68	27,8
Benevolence	158	64,5	Success	57	23,3
Sharing	156	63,7	Solidarity	52	21,2
Tolerance	140	57,1	Leadership	51	20,8
Self-confidence	137	55,9	Wisdom / Common Sense	47	19,2
Team work	111	45,3	Simplicity	39	15,9
Happiness	109	44,5			
Justice	105	42,9			

It is observed that teachers mainly prefer responsibility (80,4%), love (70,6%), honesty (69,8%), respect (68,6) at a high level; whereas success (23,3%), solidarity (21,2%), wisdom / common sense (19,2%), simplicity (15,9%) at a low level to support through picture storybooks

In focus group interviews, teachers also expressed that the erosion of values increased in the society, character education messages in picture storybooks raise an awareness for values, and character education is essential for a "sustainable human and social life". According to the findings, the reasons for the preference of picture storybooks vary among teachers, but the most important reason is their support for the character development of the children.

Table 3. Distribution of teachers' views on the problems and how character education should take place in picture storybooks

Problems to reach the story books (N=91)	f	%
The lack of books in the desired quality, in the desired location	79	86,8
The high price of books and limited financial resources	28	30,8
Insufficient recognition of the authors and their works	5	5,5
The lack of publication diversity	6	6,6
Deficiencies of Picture Storybooks (N = 245)	f	%
Stories often includes same values.	126	51,4
Pictures do not reflect the exact traits of characters in the story	78	31,8
There are values that are inappropriate for the child's level	59	24,1
Messages containing positive character traits are insufficient	49	20,0
How should character education take place in picture storybooks?	f	%
It should benefit from the examples of children's daily lives	96	39,2
It must be appropriate to the developmental stage	76	31,0
Pictures must be appealing and appropriate to the content.	74	30,2
It should benefit from the subtext and implicit learning without any concern for advice and message	51	20,8
Heroes should be a role model to children	43	17,6
Values should be reinforced by repetition through positive characters	40	16,3
Values should be diversified / and same values should not be overemphasized	39	15,9
Stories should give clear, concise, crisp and brief messages	37	15,1
The message should be corresponded attracting children's attention and raising awareness	26	10,6
Must comply with the principles of teaching	26	10,6
It should be informative and entertaining	14	5,7
Thought provoking stories with lessons to draw from should be constructed.	14	5,7

The problem for 86,8% of teacher is unavailability of desired quality of books at desired locations, to 30,8% high prices of books and limited financial resources, to 6,6% the low variety of books, and to 5,5% under-acknowledgment of authors and their works.

According to Table 3, 51,4% of the teachers underline that same values are often overemphasized, 31,8% say that the pictures do not reflect the character traits of the characters in the story, 24,1% say that there are inappropriate values for the level of the child in the stories, 20% say that the messages with positive character traits are insufficient. In focus group interviews, teachers responded the question of how they would give place to character education if they had been a storybook writer with this: "I would focus on empathy, the importance of kinship and social ties, cultural elements, integrity and respect issues". They also expressed that they would have prepared a content that would educate authentic, creative and environment friendly children.

It is seen that 39,2% of the teachers suggest stories be drawn from the examples of daily lives of children, 31% suggest they should be appropriate to the developmental stage of children, 30,2 % suggest pictures in the storybook be appropriate for the content and be appealing. It can be said that there are different views on the providing of character education through storybooks, which is instructive for the researchers and authors. In focus group interviews teachers wanted books to be thought-provoking, stories to be appropriate to the cultural structure, the messages conveyed through the stories should be more clear and concise and also to exhibit an alternative end (positive/negative).

Table 4. Teacher's role in the providing of character education (n=245)

Teacher's role in character education	f	%
Teachers should be role models	174	71,0
Teachers should lead, guide and advise	73	29,8
Should use effective teaching methods	47	19,2
Should share the goals with the families and cooperate	30	12,2
Children should be encouraged and motivated	25	10,2
Positive behaviour should be encouraged and negative behaviours should be corrected	20	8,2
Teachers should dramatize well while storytelling	19	7,8
Should prepare the children for real life	13	5,3
Preferred teaching method	f	%
Drama	220	89,8
Play	180	73,5
Question-answer	131	53,5
Brainstorming	105	42,9
Case study review	90	36,7
Group discussion	87	35,5
Narrative	83	33,9
Value description	34	13,9
Value analysis	23	9,4
Moral reasoning	23	9,4
Inculcation of values	23	9,4

In Table 4, it is seen that 71% of the teachers think that they should be role models, 29,8% think they should lead and instruct, 19,2% think they should use effective teaching methods, 12,2% think targets should be shared with families, and there should a cooperation with the family, 10,2% think that children should be encouraged and motivated. The idea that teachers should be role models is strongly preferred to others. In focus group interviews, they mainly emphasize teacher's role as a role model and express this as "effective teaching". It is seen that for an effective character education, 89,8% of teachers prefer drama, 73% prefer play, 53,5% prefer question-answer, 42,9% prefer brainstorming, 36,7% prefer case study review, 35,5% prefer group discussion, 33,9% narrative, 13,9% value description, 9,4% prefer value analysis, moral reasoning and inculcation of values.

Teachers' opinions about the methods they prefer to use for an effective character education are addressed in focus group interviews. Teachers expressed that they primarily preferred methods or techniques like rhymes, songs, puppets, drama, case study, play and acting. They also emphasized that implementations developed by adumbration (hidden curriculum) in a non-didactic way should be benefited in order to enable an efficient participation by the child and reflection of values.

4. Discussion

In this research it was aimed to examine the views and practices of preschool teachers in picture storybooks to support character education. Results showed that teachers accept impact of character education in the early childhood and think that it can be provided by picture storybooks even they have problems to find these kind of books. The majority of teachers see themselves partially competent in giving education through picture storybooks. It is understood from focus group interviews that teachers need support programs for character education. In a research conducted by Tarkoçin, Berktaş and Uyanık Balat (2013), preschool teachers have knowledge about values education to a certain degree. In Maltepe's research (2009), it is observed that in choosing works from children's literature, the rate of teachers who see themselves competent and those incompetent is approximate. However, the reason for teachers' insufficient self-competence is their lack of knowledge. Confident teachers will utilize the educational process in building the character of the child against external negative influences by believing in his internal powers (Demirel, 2009). In this case, it is evident that teachers should be supported in how to give character education

Teachers think that storybooks support character education and it is important for a sustainable human development. Stories are important educational tools that will help model behaviors to be transferred and placed into human consciousness (Edgington, 2002). Dilidüzungün (1996) states that highly imaginative children cannot establish logical relationships like adults do, that there is a different mechanism of their minds. He adds that a child of this period is appealed by stories containing both imaginary and real elements and the parallelism between the logic constructed in the story and the thinking of the child. Boratav (2013) impact that stories are one of the fundamental elements that educate the society. Human being has narrated his own life truth, solution offers, and expectations by ascribing to stories and characters and for centuries, they have tried to warn, educate and equip future generations for the hardships of life. Children would identify themselves with the characters in the stories, and for this reason, the characters should bear positive qualities. Different genres of children literature offer important opportunities to teachers as they facilitate association of values with daily lives (Edgington, 2002; Karniol, 2012). The presence of various storybooks that include character education in the educational environment enables teachers' access to the aimed acquisitions for their students. In this context, it can be said that the use of picture storybooks in character education is supported by the body of literature.

Among the universal values that teachers want to include in the picture storybooks content are responsibility, honesty, love, respect, friendship values (Rokeach, 1973; Court & Rosental, 2007; Ryan, 2008; Acat & Aslan, 2011; Edgington, 2002). Preschool curriculum proposes the adoption of universal values as well. Thus, teachers' preference of universal values more can be regarded as positive. Akyol's research (2012) proves that while values like happiness, learning, kindness, responsibility, friendship, love and cooperation are given wide place in these books, values like self-acceptance, diligence, and creativity, tolerance are given little place. Dirican (2013) reveals that picture storybooks overemphasize the values of love, sharing, happiness, kindness and friendship whereas tolerance, empathy and self-confidence are underemphasized. In focus group interviews teachers expressed the sameness in topics and the need to increase topic diversity. In this case, it can be claimed that books supporting character education should be allowed more and the values addressed in these books should be enriched. Another finding obtained from the research is the pictures in the storybooks do not reflect the features of character education. They should be appealing and appropriate to the content. A child grasps the story not only through the text but also pictures (Sari, 2006; Strasser & Seplocha, 2007). They can communicate by the pictures without any need for a written or oral explanation. The first stimuli attracting the child to the book and the first feature that appeals to the children is its visual quality. Picture storybooks not only improve child's sense of aesthetics but also make possibly boring narratives enjoyable, and strengthens the ability of judgment (Tür & Turla, 1999; Oğuzkan, 2001; Sever, 2008) As it is seen from the teachers' views, picture storybooks should be enriched in terms of the values addressed and their illustration qualities.

Regarding the method of the proper way of giving character education, teachers primarily express that stories should be prepared by benefiting from daily life experiences of children. According to Çağdaş and Seçer (2002), one of the variables which is important in terms of character education is child's experiences with his environment. Through these experiences, the child makes right decisions and gains the ability which is required for his adjustment to the changing environment. Whether picture storybooks are appropriate to the developmental stage of the child is also attached importance by the teachers. Picture storybooks that are intended for children should be appropriate to the developmental stage of children in terms of topic, language and style (Tür & Turla, 1999; Oğuzkan, 2001; Karatay, 2011).

Teachers see themselves as primary role model in character education. In focus group interviews, they mainly emphasize teacher's role as a role model and express this as "effective teaching". The body of literature is seen to have supported this view: Teachers have a crucial role in the development of children's character (Yığittır & Ocal, 2010; Yıldırım, 2007). Therefore, teachers are expected to serve as role models, benefit from character education programs, and offer students opportunities from which they can benefit practically through extra-curricular activities (Milson & Mehlig 2002; Veugelers, 2000; Yaşar & Çengelci, 2012). Ergun and Gündüz (2011) have also concluded from their research that teachers are aware of their responsibilities in value transfer, they pay attention to exhibiting behavior that would be an example to their students and think that being a role model is one of the best methods in character education.

It is observed that for an effective character education, teachers much prefer drama, play, question-answer and brainstorming methods. According to Hossain and Marinova, (2004), more advanced teaching methods that will lead to desired results are sought for along with traditional teaching methods in character education. However, being effective learning methods; drama and play facilitate learning process by making it enjoyable for pre-school children, therefore they should be evaluated as an expected and positive preference for the teachers (Yıldırım, 2009; Lake, 2011). Akbaş's research (2009) reveals that teachers benefit from methods such as

inculcation, advising and sharing nice words in value transfer. Yaşar and Çengelci (2012) determine in their research that teachers generally use question-answer method, they benefit from story, drama, and case studies, discuss examples from daily lives in the class in order to bring values; besides these they talk about current issues in the media, organize trips and try to include the parents to the activities. Values can be improve more effectively when they are part of the activities such as family participation and social service instead of didactic information transfer (Yıldırım, 2007), bringing in.

According to findings obtained from the research, the following suggestions are proposed:

1. Promotional activities should be carried out for qualified picture storybooks on the internet and in printed media in order to reach more schools and teachers.
2. Books with character education content can be offered for sale at reasonable costs and conditions.
3. Classes aimed at character education can be included in the departments of Preschool Education.

Notes

[1] The data is derived from PhD thesis "Character Education of Picture Storybooks Used by Preschool Education teachers in educational activities—A study in Terms of Teachers' Opinions and Implementations" , conducted in the counselling of Assoc. Prof. Dr. İlkay Ulutaş.

[2] The paper is presented in the Second Congress of National Values (International Participation) held by the University of Kırıkkale on November 5-7 2015.

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